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ABSTRACT

Confronted with the problem of sexual harassment, a public high school in New Jersey implemented an awareness program. To document the extent of sexual harassment, the administration arranged for the Career Equity and Assistance Center for Research and Evaluation at Montclair State University to conduct a replication of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) survey on sexual harassment. The instrument used in the AAUW study was administered to all students during their English classes. Of the 711 students surveyed, 46% were female. A major finding was that 76% of the students believed that harassment happened in their school, and 73% had personally experienced sexual harassment. Most (94%) of the harassment took place between students, but 30% of students reported teacher to student harassment. Students reported that 47% of the harassment occurred in the hallways and 29% occurred in the classroom. Most students (59%) believed that harassment occurred because it gave the perpetrator power over another person. Results were in general agreement with the AAUW study, although reported levels were slightly lower in the New Jersey school. A major difference between the two studies was that students in the original AAUW study saw harassment as just a part of school life, rather than an attempt to gain power over someone. (Contains 4 figures, 1 table, and 2 references.) (SLD)

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN A NEW JERSEY HIGH SCHOOL: A REPLICATION STUDY.

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RESEARCH BULLETIN

NEW JERSEY CAREER EQUITY ASSISTANCE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

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LIFE SKILLS CENTER, MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Research Bulletin No. 15

Sexual Harassment in a New Jersey High School: A Replication Study

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All students in a public high school in New Jersey were surveyed to determine the extent of sexual harassment during school activities. The impact of harassment was described by the students in response to the question: "In your own words try to describe how you felt right after being sexually harassed." The responses included:

"After being sexually harassed, you feel degraded and exploited. You also feel helpless, because you might not be able to do something back."... female, black, 9th grader

"I thought about it a little, it was on my mind and I felt rejected and confused, and unattractive."... female, white, 9th grader

"Very strange. It was strange because I had never done anything to the harasser."... male, white, 11th grader

"I felt betrayed by the person because we had been friends for a while and then he totally betrayed my trust."... female, white, 10th grader

BACKGROUND

In 1992, the findings of *The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls* indicated problems of gender equity and bias within the public schools of America. To further investigate these problems, specifically sexual harassment, AAUW commissioned another national survey which was reported in *Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools*. Four out of five students (81%) in that survey said that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment during their school lives.

Confronted with the problem of sexual harassment, a public high school in New Jersey initiated an awareness program. To document the extent of sexual harassment, the administration arranged to have a replication of the AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools conducted in their school.

METHOD OF STUDY

The Career Equity and Assistance Center for Research and Evaluation at Montclair State University (CEAC) was directed to conduct the replication study. The survey instrument previously used by Louis Harris and Associates to conduct the AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools was employed.

Personnel from the CEAC administered the test to all students attending school on one day in February, 1995. Tests were administered in English classes and all classes were tested on the same day. Students enrolled in multiple English classes were instructed to complete the survey only once. Teachers stayed in the room dur-

ing the completion of the test; however, they were requested to stay at the front of the room. Students were instructed to consider all school activities when answering questions, but to limit answers to only school activities.

Questions were answered directly on the test forms and were hand entered for computer analysis at the CEAC. Number and frequency were determined for each question.

FINDINGS

Of the 711 students surveyed, 46% were female and 54% were male. The largest percentage of the students (34%) were in the 10th grade with most of the remainder enrolled in the 11th grade (32%) or the 9th grade (25%).

The majority of the students (64%) indicated that they were White/Caucasian. Additional demographic categories included Other (10%), Black/

African-American (10%) and Asian (10%).

The Problem

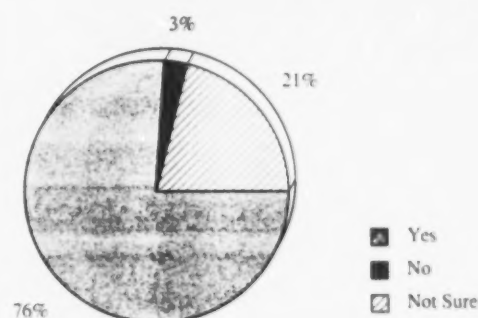
The first question students were asked was "Do you think you know what 'sexual harassment' is?" Nearly all of the students (92%) responded in the affirmative. Only 1% indicated that they did not think they knew what sexual harassment was while 7% were not sure.

Students were then presented with the following definition of sexual harassment:

"Sexual harassment is unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior which interferes with your life.

Sexual harassment is not behaviors that you like or want (for example wanted kissing, touching, or flirting.)"

Figure 1. "Keeping in mind the definition of sexual harassment, do you think sexual harassment happens in your school?"



your school?" Slightly over three-fourths (76%) responded "yes," 21% selected "not sure" and only 3% selected "no" (see Figure 1).

The majority of the students (94%) indicated that the harassment in their school was student to student harassment. However, nearly one-third (30%) indicated that teacher to student harassment occurred, 17% indicated student to teacher harassment and 10% indicated school employee to student (see Figure 2). Since students could check more than one type of harassment, percentages add to more than 100 percent.

After reading the definition, students were asked to respond to the following question: "Keeping the definition of sexual harassment in mind, do you think sexual harassment happens in

To determine the types of sexual harassment occurring during school activities, students were asked: "During your entire school history, has a person you know from school experienced any of the following things when she or he did not want to experience them?"

Sexual remarks, gestures or jokes were the most common form of harassment, with four out of five students (81%) reporting knowing

Figure 2. "Who do you think is doing the harassing at your school?"

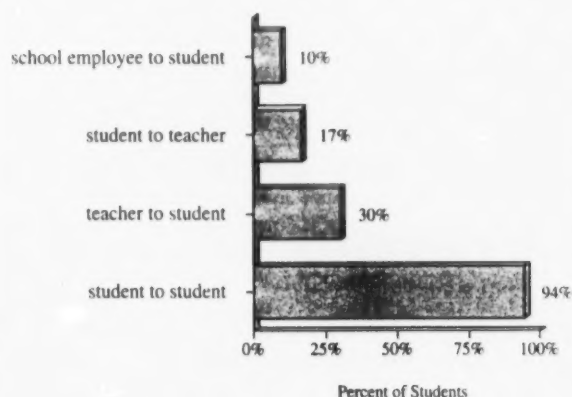


Table 1. Types of Sexual Harassment Experienced

Type of Behavior	Number	Percent
Sexual remarks, gestures, or jokes about her/him	574	81%
Received a sexual picture or note about her/him	202	28%
Sexual graffiti, messages, or pictures about her/him (for example on the bathroom wall, locker room)	293	41%
Sexual rumors spread about her/him	495	70%
Called lesbian or gay; or "homo," "faggot," "lezzie," "dyke"	542	76%
Had someone "moon" or expose themselves to her/him	355	50%
Were brushed up against, grabbed at, or pinched in a sexual way	420	59%
Had her/his clothing pulled at, off, or down	256	36%
Been blocked or cornered in a sexual way	218	31%
Been forced to kiss someone	106	15%
Made to do something sexual besides kissing	97	14%

someone who had experienced this form of harassment.

Other forms of harassment identified by students as occurring during school activities included being called lesbian, gay or other homosexual reference (76%), having sexual rumors spread (70%), being brushed up against, grabbed or pinched in a sexual way (59%) and having someone "moon" or expose themselves (50%). Other types of harassment experienced are listed in Table 1.

Only about one fourth of the students (27%) indicated that they had never personally experienced any sexual harassment.

To examine the causes of harassment, students were asked: "Why do you think sexual harassment occurs?" The largest percentage (58%) answered that sexual harassment gives a person power over someone. Over half the students (52%) answered that it is just a joke. Other responses are included in Figure 3.

When asked when they first experienced sexual harassment, the largest group of students (17%) indicated grades 9-11. Seventh grade was indicated by the next largest percentage (13%). Some students (6%) indicated that sexual harassment had started as early as grades 1-3.

To determine where sexual harassment occurs, the students were asked "If you have experienced sexual harassment at school, where has it occurred?" The most common site of harassment, selected by almost half of the students (47%), was the hallways. The second most common site checked by 29% of the students was the classroom. Only 7% indicated that the harassment occurred in the bathroom and 9% in the locker room. See Figure 4 for additional places where harassment occurred.

When asked if they would report if they were harassed, students' answers differed depending on who harassed them. If the harasser was a teacher or a school employee, 66% of the students responded that they would report the harassment, 26% were not sure and only 9% said that they would not report the harassment.

If a student was the harasser, the percentage of students who would re-

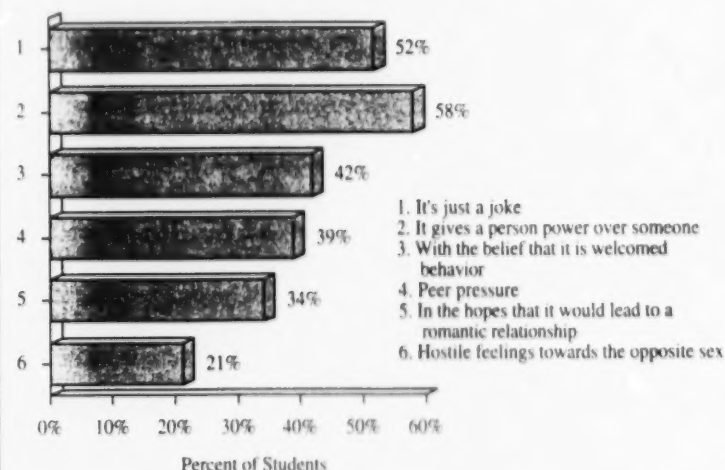
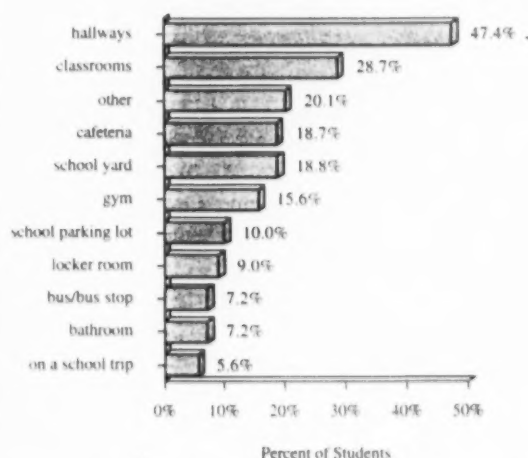
Figure 3. "Why do you think sexual harassment occurs?"

Figure 4. "If you have experienced sexual harassment at school, where did it occur?"



port the harassment fell to only 40%. In the case of a student harasser, 37% reported that they were not sure if they would report the incident and 23% indicated that they would not.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Results of the present study demonstrate that sexual harassment is a major problem. Major findings include:

- ❑ 76% of the students believe that harassment happens in their school.
- ❑ 73% of the students had personally experienced harassment.
- ❑ 94% of the harassment took place between students; however, 30% of the students reported teacher to student harassment.
- ❑ 47% of the harassment occurred in the hallways and 29% in the classrooms.
- ❑ 59% of the students believe harassment occurs because "it gives a person power over someone."

Both the current and the AAUW surveys found that sexual harassment is a

wide spread problem in our schools. The current study reported slightly lower levels (76%) than the AAUW survey (81%), but both levels represent a pervasive problem.

Both studies also reported that student to student harassment was the most common form, 95% in the current study and 79% in the

AAUW survey. Similarly, public places were the most common sites for harassment in both studies. The most frequent site of harassment was the hallways, 47% in the current study compared to 66% in the AAUW survey, followed by classrooms, 29% in the current study compared to 55% in the AAUW survey.

A major difference between the two studies relates to the reasons students think harassment occurs. In the current study, the reason cited by the largest percentage of students (58%) is that "it gives a person power over someone." Only 6% indicated this was a reason for harassment in the AAUW survey. The reason for harassment given by the largest percentage of students in the AAUW survey (37%) was "it's just a part of school life/a lot of people do it."

One possible reason for this important difference is the intervention awareness program initiated prior to

the current study. One outcome goal of awareness programs is for students to become familiar with underlying causes of harassment. The current study reflects an understanding on the part of these students that harassment does not just occur without reason.

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